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Arrested on spy rap

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Washington (News Bureau)—Otto Attila Gilbert, 50, a former Forest Hills, Queens, resident who left Hungary in 1956, was charged with espionage yesterday after he allegedly tried to pay an Army warrant officer for information on weapons and troop deployment, the FBI said.

Gilbert was held without bail in Augusta, Ga., pending an April 30 hearing on the charges of conspiracy to obtain and deliver information relating to the national defense, charges that carry a sentence of life in prison or death.

He was arrested by FBI agents in downtown Augusta—site of the Army's Fort Gordon—Saturday after he allegedly paid \$4,000 to Warrant Officer Janos Szmolka, who had been cooperating with the FBI as an undercover agent for the past four years.

Authorities said Gilbert pretended to be a refugee who fled Hungary after the abortive 1956 uprising there but actually was working on behalf of the Hungarian Military Intelligence Service. They said he became a naturalized citizen in 1962.

Apparently he lived with his mother in a Forest Hills apartment until last fall, when he told neighbors he was going back to Hungary.

Authorities said Gilbert seemed particularly interested in the Savannah River (S.C.) plant that makes weapons-grade nuclear material. Savannah River is not far from Augusta.

Authorities gave this account of their long-running surveillance of Hungarian intelligence operations in the United States and Europe:

Szmolka, who is of Hungarian origin, was first contacted by Hungarian intelligence when he returned to Hungary for a visit in December 1977. Szmolka immediately contacted U.S. authorities upon his return to this country and was told to play along with the demands of a Hungarian agent, Lajos Perlaki.

Perlaki met Szmolka, who was stationed in Europe at the time, and on one occasion, in a December 1979 meeting in Vienna, offered Szmolka \$100,000 to turn over classified information on weapons, troop deployment, and National Security Agency codes.

There is no indication that Szmolka ever received that amount, but he did get \$3,000 from Perlaki for 16 rolls of film.

Szmolka was reassigned back to Fort Gordon in 1980, and the Hungarians made arrangements to turn him over to an alleged Hungarian intelligence operative working in the U.S.—Gilbert.

Szmolka and Gilbert had their first meeting last Saturday, according to court papers filed by the Justice Department. They met at the Confederate War Memorial in downtown Augusta.

Szmolka was wired with a transmitter, and FBI agents, tuned in nearby, made the arrest after Gilbert allegedly paid \$4,000 to Szmolka for classified documents. Officials said Gilbert had the film and documents in his possession when arrested.

Authorities said Gilbert had a plane ticket to fly out of the country just a few hours after the meeting with Szmolka.